

- C000 General Information
- C020 Restricted or Nonmailable Articles and Substances

C021 Articles and Substances Generally

021

Summary C021 describes the legal regulations prohibiting or restricting the mailing of certain items such as liquors, abortive and contraceptive devices, odd-shaped items in envelopes, motor vehicle master keys, and locksmithing devices.

1.0 RESTRICTED MATTER—GENERAL

Restricted matter is an article or substance prohibited or limited by Title 18, U.S. Code (liquors, abortive and contraceptive devices, odd-shaped items in envelopes, motor vehicle master keys, and locksmithing devices). It also includes matter not otherwise described in [C020](#) that is restricted by 18 USC 1716(a) because it may, under conditions encountered in the mail, be injurious to life, health, or property (obnoxious odors, liquids, powders, and battery-powered devices).

2.0 NONMAILABLE ARTICLES AND SUBSTANCES—GENERAL

Basic Information 2.1 The basic premise of the postal mailability statutes is that anything “which may kill or injure another, or injure the mails or other property...” is nonmailable. Several statutory exceptions to this rule permit mailings of otherwise nonmailable matter under specified conditions. Statutory exceptions apply to live scorpions, poisonous drugs and medicines, poisons for scientific use, switchblade knives, firearms, motor vehicle master keys, locksmithing devices, and abortive and contraceptive devices. The statutes also provide that the USPS may, by regulation, permit the mailing, under required conditions of preparation and packing, of potentially harmful matter not “outwardly or of [its] own force dangerous or injurious to life, health, or property.” The standards in [C021](#) summarize the statutory prohibitions and exceptions. The specific mailability standards that apply to perishable, hazardous, and restricted matter are detailed in [C022](#), [C023](#), and [C024](#), respectively. Publication 52, *Acceptance of Hazardous, Restricted, or Perishable Matter*, contains additional clarification and further describes the conditions of preparation and packaging under which the USPS accepts for mailing potentially harmful matter that is otherwise nonmailable.

Mailer Responsibility 2.2 The mailer must comply with applicable postal laws and regulations governing mailability and preparation for mailing, as well as nonpostal laws and regulations on the shipment of particular matter.

USPS Refusal 2.3 USPS employees may refuse an article for mailing if the content of the article is described by the mailer or otherwise revealed to be nonmailable.

Other Laws and Regulations 2.4 Particular matter may be mailable under postal statutes and regulations, but customers may have responsibilities under nonpostal statutes and regulations concerned with possession, treatment, transmission, or transfer of such matter (e.g., 49 CFR 100-185 (Department of Transportation Regulations); the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970 (Public Law 91-513), 21 USC 801, et seq.; and the Gun Control Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-618), 18 USC 921, et seq.).

Statutory System 2.5 18 USC 2510, et seq., constitutes a statutory system of regulating interception of wire, oral, or electronic communications. Any person contemplating the mailing of a device primarily useful for surreptitiously effecting such interception should consider the provisions of 18 USC 2510, et seq., particularly section 2512. This



statute makes it a crime, except as otherwise provided in 18 USC 2510, et seq., for a person intentionally to send through the mail any device whose design that person knows, or has reason to know, renders the device primarily useful for surreptitious interception of wire, oral, or electronic communications. The statute does not declare that such a device in itself constitutes nonmailable matter but, as indicated, provides criminal penalties for the act of intentionally mailing it.

**Authorizing
Mailability**
2.6

A postmaster may decide whether articles and substances other than written, printed, or graphic matter are nonmailable and, where appropriate, is authorized to refuse to accept for mailing such matter determined to be nonmailable. The mailer may seek a review of the postmaster's decision by the RCSC. The mailer may file a written appeal of the RCSC ruling with the USPS Recorder, Judicial Officer, with a copy or description of the determination or ruling. The rules of procedure for the determination of such appeals are in 39 CFR 953.

Protecting Employees
2.7

A postmaster may take any step reasonable and necessary to protect USPS employees and equipment from potentially dangerous or injurious materials or substances found in the mail.

**Applicability to
Military Postal
System**
2.8

C020 applies to the military postal system, its personnel, and undelivered mail that is or has been in the official custody of that system and its personnel. References to the Inspection Service refer to the Postal Inspection Service and its authorized employees, not to military investigative services.

3.0 INJURIOUS AND HARMFUL ARTICLES

General
3.1

Except as provided in this document, any article, composition, or material is nonmailable if it can kill or injure another or injure the mail or other property. Harmful matter includes, but is not limited to:

- a. All types and classes of poisons, including controlled substances.
- b. All poisonous animals, except scorpions; all poisonous insects; all poisonous reptiles; and all types of snakes, turtles, and spiders.
- c. All disease germs or scabs.
- d. All explosives, flammable material, infernal machines, and mechanical, chemical, or other devices or compositions that may ignite or explode.

Hazardous Materials
3.2

Harmful matter also includes hazardous materials that are likely to harm USPS employees or to destroy, deface, or otherwise damage mail or postal equipment. This includes materials such as caustic poisons (acids and alkalies), oxidizers, or highly flammable liquids, gases, or solids; or materials that are likely, under conditions incident to transportation, to cause fires through friction, absorption of moisture, or spontaneous chemical changes or from retained heat from manufacturing or processing, including explosives or containers previously used for shipping high explosives with a liquid ingredient (such as dynamite), ammunition, fireworks, radioactive materials, matches, or articles emitting obnoxious odors.

4.0 MARKING

Content
4.1

Except firearms and switchblade knives, controlled substances, radioactive materials, and motor vehicle master keys and locksmithing devices, the identity of the content of anything mailed under **C020** must be plainly and durably marked on the address side of each mailpiece as a condition of mailing. When the content is a hazardous material as defined in 49 CFR, each mailpiece must be marked as required in **C023**.

- Addressing**
4.2 On any package, the mailing of which is covered by [C020](#), the name and address of both the mailer and the addressee must be affixed to the outside using a material or method that is not water-soluble, easily rubbed off, or smeared.
- Warning Label**
4.3 Except for controlled substances mailed under [C024](#), any label or other marking required by federal law or the regulation of any federal agency must be securely affixed or applied to the address side of each mailpiece. See [C023](#) for warning labels for hazardous material.

